

KERA UPDATE

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Problem with the NAEP 1998 Reading Test — More Students Excluded

This Update discusses a problem that I identified on March 4th, 1999, the day the *National Assessment of Educational Progress 1998 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States* was released to the public.

The National Assessment, called the NAEP for short, is a federal department of education program. States may choose to participate, and generally about 40 do so in any particular year. While NAEP has been around for decades, only since 1990 have the results for certain tests been available down to the state level. The lead state NAEP test was 8th grade math in 1990. In 1992, both 4th and 8th grade math were tested along with 4th grade reading. Only 4th grade reading was assessed in 1994.

In 1996, 4th and 8th grade math were again assessed with state level results, and science was tested for the first time. In 1998, 4th and 8th grade reading were the only state level assessments.

When the 1998 reading tests were released for Kentucky, it turned out that the 4th

grade public school reading scores had jumped from 212 in 1994 to 218 in 1998. This moved Kentucky up considerably in the state rankings, and the Kentucky Commissioner of Education and many state newspapers printed glowing announcements about the improvement.

However, a potentially serious problem became apparent when the NAEP exclusion rates for students with disabilities were examined. Originally, NAEP identified a raw sample of about 2700 4th grade Kentucky students for testing in 1998. As things turned out, 10% of these had to be excluded from the final scoring because of conflicts between their individual education plans and the NAEP guidelines for testing of IEP students. Thus, the sample was reduced to 2442 students who actually counted in the final scoring. By comparison, only 4% of Kentucky's 1994 raw sample were excluded.

The 6% difference represented a rather appreciable portion of the overall group, and it seemed reasonable that eliminating

this extra 6% students from testing in 1998 could certainly impact the cross-year comparability of Kentucky's scores.

In addition, it was discovered that exclusion rates for other states varied widely in 1998. Only two states had higher rates of exclusion than Kentucky's, but many states had lower rates. This raised a question about whether it was valid to compare Kentucky, with a 10% exclusion of students with disabilities, to states like California and Minnesota which only excluded 3% of their students for the same reason.

Some initial research indicates that there may indeed be a problem. Regression analysis of the changes in exclusion rates from 1994 to 1998 versus the changes in scores showed a positive line with a slope of about 0.5 increased points for each 1 percent increase in exclusion. There was also a positive Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.41. One professional researcher indicates that is problematic.

At this point, there are really more questions than answers, but the situation is serious enough that the Chair of the National Assessment Governing Board has already commissioned two separate studies to examine the problem. The speed with which this action was taken is probably the best indication so far that there may indeed be a problem here. We shall have to wait for the outcome of those studies before any farther discussion will be possible, as much of the data required for the analysis has not been released. But, for now, it is clear that celebration over Kentucky's scores is premature, at best.

Percent of the originally selected NAEP sample that was tested or excluded due to IEP status in 1994 and 1998

